

LD 3 Sermon Outline

Theme: God created us good, we fell into corruption through Adam's sin, and we need to be born again by the Holy Spirit's power.

Intro: Rapport/Application

Sin & Misery: Did God create humanity so wicked and perverse (naturally inclined to hate God and neighbour rather than love them cf LD 2)

Point 1: God created humanity good and in his own image

From experience/Image; you know how this looks/feels

God created us good (Ge 1:31) and in his own image Ge 1:26-27 v III:

that is: in true righteousness and holiness Eph 4:24 III:
ie central attributes of God himself, and his nature

truly knowing God our creator Col 3:10 III:

loving him completely (cf LD 2; Mt 22) III:

living with him in eternal happiness for his praise and glory Ge 1,2; Ps 8; Re 21,22 III:

Kingdom vision/Be inspired: Imagine what things would have looked like today if Adam hadn't fallen.

Point 2: Our corrupt nature comes from Adam/Eve's fall into sin

From experience/Image; you know how this looks/feels

Our corrupt human nature came from the fall/disobedience/rebellion of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise. Ge 3

federal headship cf Ro 5:18,19 III:

This has so poisoned our nature Ro 5:12, 18,19 III:

that we're no longer born

holy, righteous, but born sinners-- corrupt from conception on. Ps 51:5 III:

Totally unable to do any good and inclined toward all evil

eg; the flood Ge 6:5; 8:21; tower of Babel Ge 11; Ge 18; cf Ro 1:18-32

ie total depravity, though not necessarily as bad as we could be – God's common grace

truly knowing God, but not knowing God III:

no longer walking with God in the cool of the day, cast out of the garden of Ge 3

inclined to idolatry cf Ro 1:18-32

loving God completely but inclined toward hating him and our neighbour of LD 2 III:

cf man & wife's relationship to each other Ge 3

living with him in eternal happiness for his praise and glory, but living in sin and misery here and now, cursing him, and destined for destruction of Ro III:

Apply: Believe in? Repent from? Prick conscience / prompt will / prime passions/drives

Point 3: Our only hope is to be born again by the Holy Spirit

From experience/Image; you know how this looks/feels

unless we are born again by the Spirit of God. John 3:3-5

Apply: Are you born again? III:

Are you growing in Christ's image? striving to grow in Christ's image? III:

Kingdom vision/Be inspired: We can be a people, growing in righteousness, holiness, relationship with God, loving him, loving others, to his praise and glory.

Extend; so what are you going to do about it this week?

Aim: Are you born again?

Lord's Day 3

Q & A 6

Q. Did God create people so wicked and perverse?

A. No.

God created them good¹ and in his own image,²

that is, in true righteousness and holiness,³

so that they might

truly know God their creator,⁴

love him with all their heart,

and live with him in eternal happiness

for his praise and glory.⁵

¹ Gen. 1:31

² Gen. 1:26-27

³ Eph. 4:24

⁴ Col. 3:10

⁵ Ps. 8

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Q & A 7

Q. Then where does this corrupt human nature come from?

A. From the fall and disobedience of our first parents,

Adam and Eve, in Paradise.¹

This fall has so poisoned our nature²

that we are born sinners--

corrupt from conception on.³

¹ Gen. 3

² Rom. 5:12, 18-19

³ Ps. 51:5

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Q & A 8

Q. But are we so corrupt

that we are totally unable to do any good

and inclined toward all evil?

A. Yes,¹ unless we are born again,

by the Spirit of God.²

¹ Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Job 14:4; Isa. 53:6

² John 3:3-5

LD 3 ser 5

Dear Congregation

In John chapter 3, Jesus has a cryptic conversation with Nicodemus the Pharisee. Nicodemus visits Jesus at night because he doesn't want anyone to know he's talking to him. He starts explaining how some of them know that Jesus is a teacher from God, or else how could he do the miracles he's been doing? And Jesus saves them both a lot of time by cutting to the heart of why they're both there. He says, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.'

But what on earth does that mean? Nicodemus doesn't know. So he asks, 'how can a man be born when he is old?' 'Surely he can't enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!' His mind boggles at the idea of a full-grown man somehow climbing back into his mother's womb to be born again. And our minds boggle as well.

But what if there was the possibility that even though we'd been born once, the life we lived was really a kind of death – that we just don't realise it? What if we were Neo in the first Matrix movie, and the life we live was a complete sham, not the real thing at all? That the world we live in had been taken over by an evil power, exploiting us, but hiding it from us. Couldn't there be the possibility then that we do need a rebirth, in a kind of way that we don't even understand or realise – can't even understand unless it happens?

That's the possibility that the Bible puts before us tonight.

Point 1

You see, in the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth – as he formed them to sustain life, and then filled them with life - things weren't the way they are today. People weren't the way we are today. The world can still be a beautiful place, but it can also be harsh, even deadly. And people can be loving and kind, caring and compassionate, but they can also be hateful and cruel, selfish and exploiting.

But in the beginning, that's not the way it was.

If you go back to Genesis 1, you discover that **God created everything good**. And that means good according to his perfect standard – no faults, no hate, no cruelty or selfishness or exploitation.

Maybe when you stand at a lookout, looking out over a rainforest, hand in hand with someone you love, it's hard to imagine that the world could have been a better place. But when you find yourself lonely in a crowd, because you're not part of the in group, ignored and insulted, then it's not so hard.

And as well as creating everything perfect, **God created us in his own image, in his own likeness**. Genesis 1 also says that 'God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.' Our first parents, Adam and Eve, were created to be like God.

Kids sometimes come home from school with a picture they've drawn of their family. There's mum, there's dad, maybe brothers and sisters. Or maybe you've seen an artist's impression of someone - Van Gogh's self-portraits, or Rolf Harris's painting of the Queen. You couldn't call them a photo, let alone a perfect image of the real thing, but there's a likeness. There's enough of a similarity to know what the picture represents.

And we carry God's image in us. We are like our Creator.

But how then are we like God? He's spirit, we're flesh and blood – how can we be made in his image?

And it's hard to tell that from Genesis 1. But there is a way that you can come to understand what that means. Because we have a description in the Bible of someone who was God come to earth in the flesh. We can study the character and life of Jesus - perfect God and perfect man all in one – someone who the Bible describes as the perfect image of the Father, 'the exact representation of his being' as Hebrews 1 puts it. And as we come to know God's eternal son, Jesus, we come to see what it means for a human being to carry God's image.

As well as that, as we put our faith in him and live for him, God recreates us to be increasingly like him. And so Ephesians 4:24 talks about us 'putting on the new self, created to be like God in true **righteousness and holiness**' – becoming right with God and set apart for him and his service.

Colossians 3:10 talks about our new self being renewed in *knowledge* in the image of its Creator. In the context of the book, that means things like a deep knowledge of God and his will. And not just a head knowledge - or an awareness of the facts, but a heart knowledge - a deep personal relationship based on trust and commitment – like the one you have with a best friend, a spouse.

Righteousness, holiness and deep relational knowledge are key attributes that we share with God – central to how we're made in his image. We can discover from the Bible what these attributes mean in practice as we look at the life of Jesus. And as we do that, we come to understand key aspects of how we've been made like God.

That also reminds us of the kind of *love* that Lord's Day 2 described last week – loving God with everything we are in a totally committed, self-sacrificial way. That kind of love is an attribute that God originally built into us as well. And so you'll remember that God also calls us to love others in the kind of way that he loves us – 'this is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.'

An example of that kind of love for others is a twin, maybe 3 or 4 years old, on a medical miracles program on TV the other night. Her twin sister was accidentally burnt, ending up with 3rd degree burns to 80% of her body. Chances were she would die. Even if she survived, she faced a long healing process, and terrible scarring. The only place on her body that doctors could take skin to graft onto her burns was from the top of her head, and there just wasn't enough skin there. But there was one thing her twin sister could do to help – one thing she wanted to do. And that was donate her own skin to her sister - because they were genetically identical it would work. And so that's what they did, the doctors removed skin from the healthy twin, and grafted it onto the burns of her sister, so that she made an amazing and quick recovery.

She loved her sister enough to donate her own skin so that her sister would survive and quickly recover.

God made us to be like him in this kind of way – holy, righteous, knowing him, loving him, so that we might live with him in eternal happiness to his praise and glory. No sin, no suffering, no hate, no unhappiness. Just imagine what things would be like today, if that was the way things had stayed.

Point 2

But of course they didn't stay like that. That's not the way the world is today. So what happened? *What went wrong?* And you only have to move on from the first 2 chapters of Genesis to the 3rd one to see what went wrong.

In Genesis 3, our first parents, Adam and Eve, fell from righteousness, holiness and perfect relationship with God into corruption. They were faced with their first temptation, to do the one thing God had told them not to do, and they failed. They sinned. They disobeyed God. They rebelled against him.

And maybe you've wondered *what that even has to do with us?* If they happened to sin, why should that affect us and the way we are?

But something you discover later in the Bible is that the relationship Adam had with us was a representative one. He was the head of his household, and we are part of his household. When he decided to take the path of sin, and suffer its consequences, he took us with him. He was the king declaring war, taking his people into battle with him. He was the athlete forfeiting the race, his country forfeiting with him. He was the father, immigrating overseas, giving his descendants no choice but to be born with a different nationality.

And so, in Romans 5, Paul writes things like, 'through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners', 'sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned', 'the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men'.

And so, we fell into sin with Adam, however many thousands of years ago. *And our nature was corrupted along with Adam's.* We're still made in the image of God, but in a blurred, fuzzy kind of way that often makes it almost impossible to see.

And so you can take all of the attributes we just mentioned, and turn them around, and you have what humanity has become ever since the fall.

In Adam we were righteous and holy, free from sin, set apart for God and his service, *but now we're sinful*, our natures corrupt from the moment of conception on.

And I know that some people say, but how can you say that – what opportunity has a baby had to sin, especially in those earliest days after their conception - just cells dividing and embedding into the uterus wall. But the point is that we're not sinners because we sin, we sin because we are conceived sinners. We're not human at conception because we behave human, we behave like humans later in life because we're conceived human. And in the same way, we're not sinful at conception because we're already sinning then – we sin later in life because we have a sinful nature from the moment of conception. The human condition includes a natural inclination toward sin.

King David acknowledged that in Psalm 51, when he wrote, 'Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.'

God acknowledged that too at the time of the flood, that every inclination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil all the time. You see it again at the time of the tower of Babel. You see it at Sodom and Gomorrah. And Paul summarises those sorts of conclusions in the 2nd half of Romans chapter 1. We call it total depravity - the totality of our being has been affected by sin from the earliest moments of our life on.

As well as that, before the fall we knew God. You read in Genesis 3 of how God would walk with Adam and Eve in the garden in the cool of the day. They were deep, intimate, friends.

But what now? We're inclined to ignore God, neglect him, turn against him, rebel against him.

And more than that, we're inclined toward idolatry. We try to fill the place in our lives that only God can fill with other things. And so Romans 1 talks about how we worship created things. Some societies worship idols in the shapes of man or birds or animals or reptiles. Some societies worship their ancestors. Some societies worship the spirits they believe live in the rocks and trees and billabongs. Some societies worship money or status, power or pleasure.

And before the fall *we loved God completely*. But we saw last Sunday night how our inclination now is to

hate him and our neighbour. Plenty of people say that they believe there is a god of some description. But do they believe it enough to search him out, and struggle to understand who he is and what he wants, and do what he wants? And generally they don't. Our natural inclination isn't to love God completely without any thought of ourselves.

And I don't know about you, but the first hour or so of most days already reminds me that this is my natural inclination. Just helping get the kids ready for school is usually enough to lead me into sin a couple of times. Just trying to spend half an hour in the Bible and in prayer is enough to remind me how much I struggle to really know God at a deep personal level. And both of those weaknesses already show just how hard I struggle to love God completely in everything, instead of being obsessed with my own interests, and wants, and ambitions.

And I suspect that everyone of you have the same kinds of confessions. Our nature has been terribly, terribly, corrupted from what we see in Adam and Eve in Genesis 1 and 2. And the cause for that stems back to their fall into sin.

Point 3

So is there any hope? Or should we just all give up now, and go the way of all the world? Does the Bible have any comfort to offer us here? Or is it all just a downward slide to death and despair?

And there is a ray of hope – but only one.

The young child who was terribly burnt had one ray of hope, that someone with genetically identical skin would donate theirs, save her some scarring, and probably her life. Of course, for most kids there simply wouldn't even be that ray of hope.

Our one ray of hope is that we are born again by the Spirit of God from spiritual death into spiritual life.

And so Jesus had his conversation with Nicodemus where he talked about being born again by the Spirit – flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

But what do we do if we want to be born again? Where do we get the book that gives us the 5 steps to being born again?

And the problem is that it's not up to us. What baby decides that it wants to be born. Just try an imagine a baby telling its parents that it would like to be born in about 9 months, thankyou very much. Nicky's pregnant with our 6th child, but none of the six has been the one to decide they'd like to be born. Spiritual birth isn't up to us, it's God's initiative.

On the other hand, a few verses later in his discussion with Nicodemus, Jesus heads down a much more familiar path. In verse 14 he says, 'the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.' Which introduces the very familiar verse 16, 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'

If you're among the many people who only know the spiritual death we've been left with since the fall, and don't yet have the spiritual rebirth of the Holy Spirit, the one thing you can do is ask God that he give it to you. Tell him how sorry you are that you've lived your own life ignoring him. Tell him how sorry you are that you've lived your life in the kind of way that he hates. Tell him that you believe that through Jesus he offers new life, and that by the Holy Spirit he can give you new and eternal life. And God promises that he will give new birth to everyone who genuinely does these things, trusting in him, committing themselves and their lives to him.

Conc

The truth is that we have been left spiritually scarred and burnt by the fall into sin, as good as dead, doctors shaking their heads, turning away with tears in their eyes and no help to offer. Our one ray of hope is the new birth we can have as we put our trust in Jesus.

Is your trust in him? Have you been born again?